



United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit

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NEWS RELEASE

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Ninth Circuit Celebrated San Francisco Courthouse Centennial

SAN FRANCISCO – The United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit yesterday welcomed Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco and U.S. Senator Max S. Baucus of Montana for a colorful celebration marking the 100th anniversary of the James R. Browning United States Courthouse, one of the nation's most beautiful public buildings.

The afternoon festivities at the granite clad four-story courthouse at Seventh and Mission streets were co-sponsored by the General Services Administration and came 100 years to the day after the building opened in 1905 as a combination federal courthouse and post office. Now on the National Register of Historic Places and eligible for national historical landmark status, the courthouse is renowned as a grand example of the *beaux-arts* architectural style popular at the turn of the century.



Rep. Pelosi was the keynote speaker for the event, while Sen. Baucus made a special presentation recognizing the courthouse's namesake and a fellow Montanan, Judge James R. Browning. A letter of congratulations from California Senator Barbara Boxer also was read during the ceremonies.

The House Minority Leader, Rep. Pelosi was instrumental in obtaining federal funding to rebuild the courthouse, which was devastated by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. She also authored the bill signed into law last year naming the courthouse for the long serving and widely respected Judge Browning.

"Though the 1989 earthquake shook our city, the magnificent Browning courthouse bent but did not break," said Rep. Pelosi. "Together, we worked to strengthen the foundation, to restore its beauty and make it one of the first historic and technologically smart buildings in the country. Today this courthouse and its resplendent architecture are great sources of civic pride."

The special presentation recognized the enduring legacy of Judge Browning, 86, renowned as a jurist who has helped define the law and as an extraordinary administrator whose reforms and innovations launched the federal courts into the information age.

“When I think of Judge Browning, I think of his continually upbeat, positive, can-do approach,” said Sen. Baucus, who helped pass legislation in the Senate renaming the building after Browning.



“I think of his razor-sharp legal skills. And I think of his sense of humor and that smile.”

Nominated by President Kennedy, Judge Browning came onto the bench in 1961 and served as an active judge through 2000, the longest active tenure of any judge in Ninth Circuit history. He was chief judge from 1976 to 1988, the second longest tenure of any chief judge in circuit history.

Ninth Circuit Chief Judge Mary M. Schroeder, fellow Circuit Judges Marsha S. Berzon, Carlos T. Bea and Dorothy W. Nelson, and GSA Administrator Stephen A. Perry participated in the program, along with a number of special guests.

“This building is one of the wonders of the West and more than deserving of this special recognition. We are deeply honored to occupy it,” Judge Schroeder said in welcoming several hundred guests to the event.

In later remarks, Administrator Perry noted that the courthouse is among the gems of the GSA’s historical preservation efforts.

“We are here today to thank those who have worked so hard over the years, both recently and in the more distant past, to ensure that this 100-year-old historic landmark would be maintained and preserved for future generations,” he said. “Also, we are here to extend best wishes to all those who will administer justice within the court in years to come.”

The centennial festivities had a turn-of-the-century feel thanks to rousing John Phillip Sousa marches performed by the Golden Gate Park Band, which has been entertaining audiences in San Francisco since 1882, and costumed speakers portraying important historical figures. President Theodore Roosevelt, who held office when the courthouse first opened in 1905, was portrayed by professional actor Keith McGough, while the role of Judge William W. Morrow, who helped raise funds for construction and presided over the dedication of the building, was undertaken by Ninth Circuit Judge Sidney R. Thomas of Billings, Mont.

Providing further historical context were remarks by Professor William Deverell, director of the Institute on California and the West at the University of Southern California, and Chief District Judge Vaughn R. Walker of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, which was located in the Seventh-and-Mission courthouse until 1964. The program concluded with historical re-enactments of early cases heard by the circuit and district courts.

Costumed docents led visitors on tours of the building’s magnificent courtrooms, judicial chambers and halls. Special exhibits sponsored by the Ninth Judicial Circuit Historical Society detailed the long careers and varied contributions of Judge Browning and the late Judge Richard H. Chambers, another former chief judge who obtained many of the courthouse’s current furnishings. Also on display by the GSA was a scaled down version

of the seismic “shock absorbers” installed beneath the building following the 1989 earthquake, which will help the courthouse withstand future temblors.

The U.S. Postal Service, whose workers saved the courthouse from fire after the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906, also had a display and provided guests with commemorative envelopes bearing the historic cancellation date. The post office moved from the building following the 1989 earthquake.

Other exhibits included historical documents provided by the California Historical Society Museum, and a multimedia presentation on the Oakland Oaks and San Francisco Seals of the old Pacific Coast Baseball League, provided by Senior District Judge William Shubb of Sacramento.

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